

This is author version of article published as:

Quanchi, Max (2004) Jewel of the Pacific and Planter's Paradise: The Visual Argument for Australian Sub-imperialism in the Solomon Islands. *Journal of Pacific History* 39(1):pp. 43-58.

Copyright 2004 Taylor & Francis

"Jewel of the Pacific and planter's paradise; the visual argument for Australian sub-imperialism in the Solomon Islands"

A series of pictorial features, "In the British Solomons", appeared in Brisbane's illustrated weekend newspaper *The Queenslander* between December 1917 and July 1918 (1) at a time when the Empire was rallying to survive key battles on the Western Front in World War I. Surprisingly the series mounted an argument critical of the British administration of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate and argued that Australia would not be welcomed should the status of the Solomon Islands change in the post-war rearranging of colonies to be negotiated as Germany lost her Pacific possessions and New Zealand, Australia and Japan jostled for vacated territories. As non-Australian subjects had been seriously curtailed when illustrated newspapers concentrated visual and text content on the war, a ten-part series with two thousand word essays and eight to ten photographs on Australia's links with the Solomon Islands and generally the south-west Pacific is historically quite remarkable. Although *The Queenslander's* decision to publish the series maintained a pattern of Australian photographic imaging of sub-empire going back to the 1890s, historians have ignored this significant body of visual evidence. Acknowledgement of the role of photography in the history of Australian relations with the Pacific is therefore overdue because in shaping public opinion the mass-dissemination of visual material in the early twentieth century offers convincing evidence of Australia's diverse links with the region and in particular Australia's thwarted claims for a closer relationship with the Solomon Islands. Vargas has shown the importance of photography in the American colonial imaging of the Philippines (2) but in the Pacific only Tahiti, New Caledonia, Samoa, the trading company Burns Philp, the 1941-45 Pacific war, portraiture and tourism have attracted scholarly attention. (3) The sixty photographs in *The Queenslander* series demonstrate the importance of illustrated newspapers and magazines in the history of Australia's, and particularly Queensland's engagement with the southwest Pacific (4) and along with similar illustrated magazines and newspapers of the period indicates public awareness of the region in the early twentieth century was being shaped already by new media. The decision to publish such an extensive series indicates an editorial commitment to monitoring the economy, administration and future of nearby colonial possessions and suggested that editors were responding to reader's association with the islands through work, investment, friends or mission.

With the exception of war reporting, few other subjects matched this level of popular media penetration and although impact on attitude formation is difficult to determine, it suggests a significant level of interest in the fate of colonial possessions and the opportunities believed to exist in the neighbouring

Pacific Islands. These widely published images of the Solomon Islands certainly made known to an Australian audience the economic potential of a nearby archipelago and reflected interest among Australian readers in the shape of the world that would evolve in the post-war period. Ken Buckley and Kris Klugman's study of the Pacific trading company, Burns Philp, and Roger Thompson's study of Australian interest in the Pacific in the 1914-20 period, revealed a high level of newspaper editorial coverage of the debate over the fate of the former German New Guinea (5) and McMahon's views were paralleled in journal and magazine articles by acknowledged opinion leaders and commentators on the shake-up of colonial possessions to follow the end of the war. (6) The Solomon Islands, a British Protectorate, was not on the negotiating table but there were optimists in Australia who thought the two northern islands of the archipelago might be rejoined to the south in a wider re-distribution by the Allies, and pass fully to British or perhaps Australian control. The New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) was equally not open for negotiation but expansionists thought post-war deals might lead to the New Hebrides passing by annexation or mandate from condominium control by Britain and France, to Australia alone, or to France and Australia as the joint administering authority. Along with questions about the fate of Nauru, New Zealand's aspirations in Samoa and Japan's move for a mandate over the northern Pacific Islands vacated by Germany, (7) the fate of the Solomon Islands in late 1917 and early 1918 as a possible acquisition in the minds of some expansionists in Australia was entangled in wider geo-political manoeuvres. The series, "In the British Solomons" was therefore both topical and visually arresting to Australian readers.

The photographs of the Solomon Islands in *The Queenslander* series, drawn from ninety to a hundred photographs taken during a month long visit to the Solomon Islands by Thomas McMahon in October-November 1917, also appeared in illustrated newspapers and magazines in Australia (8) and around the world in twenty-six newspapers, monthly magazines and serialised encyclopaedia. (9) McMahon's photography of the Solomon Islands appeared immediately after he returned to Australia in December 1917, continued throughout 1918, and reappeared in journals, magazines, postcards, albums, illustrated books by other authors and serial encyclopaedia for the next twenty years. By 1923, his Solomon Island photographs had appeared on more than a hundred separate occasions. McMahon, an Australian freelance photographer, journalist and author had been touring the Pacific since 1915 submitting to illustrated magazines and newspapers a portfolio of photographs accompanied by short, anecdotal and pithy articles. (10) Like other self-proclaimed experts in this era his expertise came from a visit of a few days, usually on a scheduled mail boat or cargo run through the islands. For photographs he relied on easily accessible locations and for details on trade, economy and administration, casual discussions with traders, planters and labour recruiters. Rather than formal interviews with colonial officials he returned home and reported through his images, borrowed opinions and personal observations. The text was pretentious, polemical and expository and specific details were mostly anecdotal. Reference was made to early European explorers and lyrical descriptions of fauna, flora and topography were included. McMahon exploited a lingering interest in eastern Australia in the potential to invest in or migrate to the neighbouring western Pacific Islands and make a profit from planting, trading or mining. "In the British Solomons" also raised in reader's minds the possibility that international recognition and status might well be won through a renamed

"Australian Solomon Islands". At a personal level, McMahon's images offered readers a tantalising glimpse of successful private enterprise and a secure future for those willing to take a risk. In an era when Solomon Island copra had nearly doubled in price per ton between 1908 and 1913 (11) and both Australian investors and island administrations were favouring capital investment in plantations, the coconut was so promising it was known as the "Consol of the East". (12) The coconut, McMahon announced, was the reason that islands were "bursting out in grand fruitfulness and profitableness" and he declared that with capital and patience a twenty-one year old could take up two or three hundred acres and in ten years be comfortably established and independent. It was an offer that attracted attention in the eastern Australian states weary of war news and with the problem ahead of what to do with several hundred thousand military personnel wanting to rejoin the workforce or to start a new life. McMahon's determination to seek out editors in three continents and make a career in photojournalism was based on this double-edged visual appeal to readers - the promotion of Australian sub-imperialism and the depiction of a planter's life as a means to personal material and financial success.

McMahon's articles relied on both a gallery of images and a complementary, polemical, personal text. He was not an ethnographer, a student of the emerging social sciences or a trained recorder but he was an excellent photographer. Two thirds of the photographs in *The Queenslander* series illustrated the alleged economic stability and potential of the Solomon Islands. The photographs, usually six to a page, were graphically laid out with hand written captions and presented in *The Queenslander's* regular photography segment. This section was printed on quality art paper, with individual images measuring 18 cm by 14cm. The final in the series in May 1918 was magnificently laid out across two full pages with nine 24cm by 16cm images.

Insert 1

Typical page; TJ McMahon, "Coconut cultivation in the British Solomons" *The Queenslander*, 2 Mar 1918, 22



McMahon's essays were closer in style to the popular travelogue and illustrated format developed at the turn of the century in response to reader demand for colonial adventures, imperial expansion and exotic settings and was located in the newsprint sections under the by-line "The Sketcher". The first

pictorial segment mixed contextual and propaganda material with two portraits of Solomon Islanders, one of the crew of the *Rogeia*, the vessel in which McMahon toured the islands, a coconut plantation, an impressive Lever Brothers plantation residence and labourers bringing in a canoe load of nuts for husking. The two portraits fixed the location of the story - exotic, western Pacific - and the views of plantations, residences and labourers suggested a planter's prospects were assured by substantial infrastructure, plentiful labour and accessible, fertile land. The next two pictorial features followed the same propaganda approach, suggesting a stable colonial environment for both investors and immigrants seeking to try their luck as a planter. Wharves, trade stores, government buildings and group portraits of the local planter community were shown, with two images of native canoes and housing to maintain the geographic location. Pointedly, one caption read, "Marmora plantation, a Queensland owned property". A fifth of the captions stressed connection to Australia, reminding readers that either ownership or management of a plantation was Australian, and in one instance, noting the manager's residence at "Lavero" plantation, another Queensland property, was once an office building in Brisbane. The importance of shipping during the war years, despite commercial cargo space on British flag ships being curtailed, was highlighted by images of vessels unloading at wharves at Faisi and Guvutu, off the beach at un-named locations and by images of the Choisel Plantation Company inter-island trader *Rogeia*. A whaleboat filled to the gunnels was pictured

Insert 2

TJ McMahon, "Island trading and copra steamer from Australia loading copra", in *Solomon Islands*, (McCarron and Stewart, Sydney 1923) n.p. (Also published in *Sydney Mail*, 20 Apr 1921, 18.)



unloading coconuts for husking at a plantation in the Manning Straits. These images gave the impression that Solomon Islands copra could be harvested from remote plantations, processed, bagged and shipped within the archipelago to a depot, then to Sydney or direct to the west coast of the United States of America. Visually readers could see solid lines of harvesting and processing and copra delivered quickly to the world market. *The Queenslander's* readers were told well built, substantial homes, cheap labour, a crop in world demand, land with "superabundance", a moderate capital outlay and patience would pay back with interest the initial investment of labour, capital and time. Details of sowing, harvesting and processing were included and plantations landscapes were used as

a background for horticulture, labour and shipping scenes. Readers were offered a panoramic glimpse of the process by which plantation seedlings matured, were harvested

Insert 3

“TJ McMahon, “Seed testing nursery Liapari”, *The Queenslander*, 2 Mar 1918, 22; also published in *World’s Markets*, Aug 1920, 29; *Dun’s International Review*, Oct 1920, 135; TJ McMahon, *Solomon Islands* (McCarron and Stewart, Sydney 1923), n.p.; *Countries of the World*, 37, June 1925, 3784; *World’s Work (The world today)*, 31, 1918, 341.



as nuts and turned to copra by husking and drying, before finally being carried in bags on the shoulders of sturdy labourers to the waiting ships. McMahon included innovations such as running cattle to keep grass down and later sell as meat on the Australian market. The photographs hardly needed captions - the message was clear - coconut plantations were a success just waiting for Australian capital and men. (13)

McMahon was alert to contemporary concerns in Australia when he noted on captions that artisans and overseers were returned soldiers from Sydney. McMahon claimed a man with capital would succeed within ten years and a young man without capital might over a fifteen to twenty year period move from a salaried position to one of slowly acquiring land and setting himself and his family up as a small planter, earning the comfortable income of a thousand pounds a year. Photographs doubled as propaganda for investment and a prospectus for intending planters. McMahon relied on one carefully composed photograph to portray this potential. The image carried a clear economic message. Five Europeans, presumably planters, managers or overseers were depicted lounging on a whaleboat, one of three drawn up in a coconut grove by a beach. Several buildings stood scattered in the grove of palms. The nonchalant posture of the men suggested affluence and a pleasant way of life, a relaxed moment amid their prosperous and busy economic activity. McMahon used this image in illustrated articles in the *Sydney Mail* (1919), *World's Markets* (1920) and *Wide World Magazine* (1921) as well as a small pamphlet in 1923. In another

Insert 4

TJ McMahon, "Coconut plantation", *Sydney Mail*, 15 Feb 1919, 17; *World's Markets*, Aug 1920, 28; *Dun's International Review*, Oct 1920, 134; *Wide World Magazine*, Jan 1921, 350; TJ McMahon, *Solomon Islands* (McCarron and Stewart, Sydney 1923), n.p.



photograph the same group of men are shown wandering in "a fine coconut plantation owned by a Queensland company" and a caption noted a vista of one year old seedling palms was the result of a commitment by Lever Brothers, "the giant British soap makers (who) have invested millions in this group of islands and have many fine plantations". In an Australia still imbued with the spirit and reliability of Empire this was a persuasive argument for investors and potential planters. When McMahon asked whether the maps of the future would "show these attractive islands of the Pacific coloured red for British or black for Germany" and when he suggested "there is a moral force of national pride demanding that Australia strike for the future now ... and inquire more diligently into the progress and prospect of these Pacific Islands,"(14) readers probably agreed Australia's relationship with the region could expand or be strengthened.

In 1923, McMahon selected thirteen images for a Solomon Islands booklet in the "Pacific Islands Illustrated" series published in Sydney by McCarron and Stewart. (15) With thirteen 15cm by 10cm photographs, one to a page, these booklets sold for one shilling and nine pence to the tourist, mission, ex-colonial official and ex-resident's market. The photographs were explicit - an attractive European residence, a steamer trading and loading copra, an old growth

Insert 5

TJ McMahon, "Magistrate's house in the British Solomon Islands", *Countries of the world*, 37, June 1925, 3783 (for similar view see; *The Queenslander*, 19 Jan 1918, 21)



plantation doubling as a cattle property, a scene in a seedling nursery and a team of labourers husking a pile of coconuts. The opening image was the nonchalant planters mentioned above, lounging on a whaleboat. The mandatory ethnographic images included fishing, bamboo flutes, drums, paddling in a fleet of so-called war canoes, grass "top hats" of adolescent north Solomon males and Vella Lavella dwellings with unique banana-leaf food storage containers. Two views of substantial rivers hinted at a well-watered, arable archipelago. The economic and political agenda of the 1923 publication was obvious in the choice of images - five from the former German northern islands of Buka and Bougainville, and the remainder from the southern British Protectorate. However, McMahon's proposal for a reunion of the two sectors under Australian rule had been over-run by the declaration of mandates and resumptions of control in the post-war period. By 1923, the northern Solomon Islands were already under Australian control through the mandate granted over the former German mainland and islands of northeast New Guinea, and the British had made no change to their protectorate status in the south.

Visually the impact of full-page features on the Solomon Islands was in stark contrast to the main weekly pictorial section, full of destructive battlefield images, studio portraits of embarking soldiers and an increasing number of portraits captioned "killed in action". Pages of relaxed, tropical planters and prospering plantations stood out among the carnage of war. The opening article in *The Queenslander* series carried the triple by-line "Wonderful development; Australian Trade Prospects; Queensland's concern". The authority came from the I-was-there visit. The willingness of the Brisbane editors of *The Queenslander* to publish opinion on the Solomon Islands was matched in the United Kingdom and the United States of America and *The Queenslander* articles, after a quick cut-and-paste revision, (16) appeared in *Worlds Work* and in Britain in the *Evening Post*, *Blue Peter* and *Wide World Magazine*. McMahon argued that Australia was perceived in the islands as the victim of its own trade union tyranny on the wharves. Planters, reported McMahon, thought Australia obsessive about maintaining monopoly mail routes and cargo rates and unsuitable as a governing authority. Readers were told British rule in the islands was unpopular, unsympathetic and inimical to economic development and that expatriates were contemptuous of the final authority held by the Western Pacific High Commission, ruling from Fiji. A leaked copy of a labour report by the Lt Governor of Papua, Hubert Murray, was cited as evidence of the fear held by the expatriate community should Australian policy in Papua be applied in the Solomon Islands. (17) McMahon called for "an end forever of the species of government called British, but distinctly un-British in methods" (18) claiming this was a "constant complaint of planters, of missionaries, traders and settlers of all other classes". (19) Readers were told Solomon Islanders were given a bank holiday in an archipelago that did not have any banks, that ten thousand pounds were spent on a rarely used jetty at Tulagi and a costly government steamer lay idle in 1916 for 290 days. He called for a renewed effort by Australia to improve its reputation among the planter community, to grasp the opportunity provided by post-war re-alignments and to establish a sub-empire in the western Pacific, and should it assume control, to adopt a governing practice in the interests of expatriate European investors, settlers and traders. Privately, the British administration in the Solomons was concerned that McMahon's articles would give the wrong impression to Australian readers. The District Officer on Malaita,

William Bell, wrote in response to a request from the Assistant Resident Commissioner, Charles Workman, noting that McMahon's articles were "libellous epistles" typically voiced in colonial circles by disgruntled planters wishing to exploit both the indigenous landowners and the resources. Bell noted that McMahon merely repeated these complaints and neither fully explained the nature of the complaints nor offered any solutions. (20) This exchange remained private and no censure appeared in the letters-to-the editor columns of the Brisbane press. McMahon's journalistic practice was later attacked on similar grounds in 1921 after he criticised the Papuan administration for inactivity and not fostering economic development. This became a public debate when both the Minister and Acting Minister for Home and Territories published rebuttals in the Melbourne *Argus* attacking McMahon's practice of making short visits, listening to gossip and collecting anecdotal evidence from the expatriate but not the official community. (21) This did not detract from McMahon's popularity with editors, although it may have influenced his later decision to travel to Asia in 1925 and abandon photography in the Islands.

As McMahon's essay in the *Sketcher* column usually pursued a separate theme to the pictorial segment, readers could absorb opinions expressed in the text or draw conclusions based on their own interpretation of events depicted in the photographs. The text was didactic but legitimised by reference to planters, ship's captains, trade figures, petitions and the names of local ships, plantations and ports. The visual evidence was ambiguous. The focus on Australia's national interest, promises of individual prosperity and calls for increased imperial responsibility resonated with readers already informed that "New Guinea and Samoa before the war gave Germany large supplies of copra" (22) and by the time Prime Minister William Hughes arrived in London in June 1918 to argue for Australia in the post-war realignment of colonial territories, other illustrated newspapers in Brisbane such as *The Week* and *The Queensland News Budget* had run news items on the fate of ex-German colonies. In Melbourne, *The Age* voiced the opinion at the start of the war that "we have long realised that we have a Pacific destiny" and the post-war path could open up an Australian empire in the Pacific. (23) James Burns, the head of Burns Philp, argued in 1915, "the natural destiny of the Pacific Islands is that they come under the control of Australia". (24) In two memoranda on Australia's post-war role in the Pacific, Burns suggested the transfer to Australia of power over all British colonies and territories in the Pacific, or at least their administration from a base in Australia, close to merchants, traders and others interested in the islands. (25) This transfer would involve a lesser role in the Solomon Islands by the Fiji-based Western Pacific High Commission. In 1915, Burns went to London arguing the case for a post-war realignment including the possible transfer of the Gilbert (now Kiribati), Ellice (now Tuvalu), Tongan and Solomon Islands to Australian control. These arguments, with specific references to the administration of the Solomon Islands, were laid out in an anonymous series of articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1915 and a pamphlet titled *British mismanagement in the Pacific No 2*. (26) McMahon's private papers include annotated copies of the pamphlet and sentiments expressed in his *Queenslander* series reworked many of these ideas. (27)

Hughes announced in 1916 in London that Australia favoured using the equator as a demarcation line, with Japan conceded control of the north and Australia the south. Hughes called it an "Australasian Monroe doctrine in the

South Pacific". (28) Roger Thompson's evaluation of Hughes' campaigns in London and at the Versailles Treaty negotiations regarding the New Hebrides and former German colonies in Nauru, New Guinea and the Marshall and Caroline Islands, was that Hughes' achievements were considerable for a small, semi-independent power. Hughes was reported to have said in London, "the voice of the colonies will be dead against the return of colonies to the Huns" while diplomatically claiming that for Australia, "it is safety not aggrandisement we are playing for". (29) The personal reputation of Hughes, his demand for separate dominion representation in the negotiations and his alleged confrontation with the great powers over control of the Pacific were exaggerated in Australia, where newspapers were forced to rely on "scrappy and sensational cabled news" and Hughes' self-aggrandising reports. On his return Hughes claimed he had secured for Australia the islands which were "the ramparts of Australia's security" as well as a valuable monopoly over the economic trade and resources of Nauru and German New Guinea. (30) Apart from mandates over Nauru (jointly with New Zealand and Great Britain) and German New Guinea, Australia's relationship with the rest of the western Pacific remained as it had been before the war. (31) There is nothing in his speeches to suggest *The Queenslander* or McMahon's call for greater Australian involvement influenced Hughes. The Governor-General noted it was a topic not much mentioned at public meetings in Australia. (32) Authors and publishers regularly used McMahon's photographs (33) but his views on empire and descriptions of the Solomon Islands were rarely cited (34) and had become rapidly out of step with post-war planning and imperial developments. As Roger Thompson pointed out, by 1920 the expansionist period was over. (35) Neither McMahon's predictions, nor those of Hughes and other expansionists came true, and the Solomon Islands remained a British protectorate until reaching independence in 1978.

Predictions in *The Queenslander* series were similarly out of step in regard to plantation development and the general level of planter prosperity. The pre-war potential for prospective Australian planters in the tropics was first affected by the outbreak of war and then by a levelling off and subsequent decline as trade passed into a recession in the 1920s. In the Solomon Islands and Papua the plantation boom ended respectively in 1913 and 1914. (36) In neighbouring Papua, owner-occupiers dominated agriculture and there were few holdings by foreign-owned companies. Half the owner-occupiers and managers of company estates in Papua arrived without previous tropical experience but in the Solomon Islands, as Judith Bennett points out, most planters had moved across from a start as traders. Despite familiarity with local customs, tenure and practice they struggled for success. (37) In the Solomon Islands, the large foreign-owned company was more significant. In 1914, Levers Pacific Plantations held 230,000 of the 250,000 acres granted by the administration to Europeans. Another 170,000 acres had been bought from Solomon Islanders, though later only 145,000 acres were acknowledged as appropriated and occupied. As little as 463,425 acres in the Solomon Islands, albeit valuable coastal plantation land, had actually been alienated. (38) David Lewis notes that before the war a planter's prosperity had seemed assured by substantial influences "at work in the larger world of investment in tropical commodities" with the world price of copra doubling between 1903 and 1914 and rubber undergoing an even more spectacular boom. (39) But in the Solomon Islands, copra's value per ton exported fell during and after the war with only the good years of 1920 and 1921 to break the slump.

Solomon Islands copra was regarded as the world's lowest quality. (40) Labour, which was calculated to about 60-75% of the cost of developing a plantation, was a problem in the Solomon Islands with demand exceeding supply. (41) Images of seedling lots, mature plantations, lines of workers, wharves, shipping and group portraits of the planter community mislead Australian readers into believing the Solomon Islands was a planter's paradise but the planters lounging about the beach in the image referred to earlier would have been discussing, in late 1917, not whether more would be enticed to the islands by the pose they adopted for the camera, but whether their own futures were secure in the copra slump of the late war and immediate post-war period.

In 1919, McMahon left on a speaking tour to London, returning via the southern Australian capital cities. He reminded audiences and readers of his journal and magazine articles, there was "no greater obstacle to the British advancement of trade and enterprise ... than the strange and unpardonable ignorance of English people in not knowing how commercially wonderful these lands of the South Pacific are". (42) His call for economic expansion attracted a good response at the Royal Colonial Society and the Chamber of Commerce in London and in journals like the *Empire Review*. On tour he was speaking to sympathetic audiences who lamented the fading of empire and who saw renewed hope in McMahon's vision of post war prosperity on the colonial periphery, but investors and planters did not rush to the Solomon Islands to exploit the island's resources. In 1925, *Round Table*, a new forum and journal on imperial affairs, reviewed the first twenty-year period of Australian administration in neighbouring Papua and asked why plantations had not been profitable. The problems - inappropriate administration policies, falling commodity prices, world war, unavailability of labour and the "crowning horror" of the Navigation Act (Australia, 1912) - equally applied to the Solomons. (43) Publication of "In the British Solomons" and the widespread publication elsewhere of McMahon's photographs and text, however, do indicate a lingering fascination with sub-empire and tropical potential. There was a continuing public interest in tropical, exotic locations, indigenous cultures and Europeans living on the colonial frontier. In 1921-22, Merl La Voy, an American contemporary of McMahon's in photographing the Pacific, published fifty-five photographs in the *Sydney Mail*, in a four-part series titled "With a camera in the Solomon Islands". (44) La Voy emphasised the ethnographic over the economic, preferring portraits and villages scenes, canoes and musical instruments to plantations and colonial infrastructure. There were some images of planters, residences, husking nuts, loading copra and labourers returning to Santa Cruz after a two-year indenture on a copra plantation, but La Voy's imaging contrasts with the political and economic agenda of *The Queenslander* series just a few years earlier. This may have been the consequence of differing editorial policies at the *Sydney Mail* and *The Queenslander* and differing regional alignments between Sydney and Brisbane. Prior to running the 1917-18 series, *The Queenslander* had published several pictorial features on the Solomons. In 1910, "The mysterious Solomons" had forty-eight photographs of plantations, crops and infrastructure and "Development in the Solomon Islands" included photographs depicting economic opportunities and potential prosperity. (45) In 1915, *The Queenslander* ran pictorial features on "The future of the Solomons" and in January 1916, "In the Solomon Islands". (46) McMahon's series in late 1917 and early 1918 therefore continued an established commitment by the Brisbane editorial staff. What *The Queenslander* series demonstrates is the

popularity of early twentieth century photographic publications, particularly illustrated newspapers and magazines, and the ease with which Australian audiences could access evidence about events in the neighbouring southwest Pacific region. These links to the Solomon Islands need recognition and inclusion in a wider revision of the early twentieth century history of Australia and Australian-Pacific relations. Research on Australia's relations with the Pacific has been constrained by a focus on 18th century exploration, early 19th century trade, Pacific Island indentured labour and the "White Australia" policy so that, for example, the takeover of German New Guinea and Nauru, attempts to exert greater influence in other archipelago and Australia's considerable human, political and economic links with the region have been overlooked. Because the near-deluge of widely disseminated illustrated material on the region has been overlooked, and photographs from this era are now used as uncontested supporting illustrations it is necessary that more attention now be paid to visual histories and their complex, contrary meanings.

NOTES

1 *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 22 Dec and 29 Dec 1917, 5 Jan, 12 Jan, 19 Jan, 9 Feb, 2 Mar, 23 Mar, 11 May and 5 Jul 1918.

2 Benito Vargas, *Displaying Filipinos; photography and colonialism in early 20th century Philippines*, (Manila 1995). Although emphasising identities, constructions and identity-politics, the latest general history of the region, Donald Denoon, Philippa Mein-Smith and Marivic Wyndham, *A history of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific*, (London 2000) ignored the role of photography and visual propaganda in creating these colonial identities.

3 Anne Maxwell has recently demonstrated the importance of photography in metropolitan exhibitions, expanding on John McKenzie's earlier analysis of colonial propaganda and recent conferences of the Pacific History Association have begun to redress the situation. Anne Maxwell, *Colonial photography and exhibitions; representations of the native and the making of European identities*, (Leicester 1999); John McKenzie, *Propaganda and empire; the manipulation of British public opinion 1880-1960* (Manchester 1984). For this field see; *Imaging, representation and photography of the Pacific Islands*, a special issue of *Pacific Studies*, 20, 1, 1997; Casey Blanton, ed, *Picturing paradise; colonial photography of Samoa 1875 to 1925*, (Daytona 1995); Ann Stephen, ed, *Pirating the Pacific; images of travel, trade and tourism*, (Sydney 1993); Alison Nordström, "Samoa; stereoviews and stereotypes", *Stereo World*, 18, 4, 1991a, 4-12; Alison Nordström, "Early photography in Samoa; marketing stereotypes of paradise", *History of Photography*, 15, 4, 1991b, 272-86; Alison Nordström, "Paradise recycled; photographs of Samoa in changing contexts", *Exposure*, 28, 3, 1991/1992, 6-15; Alison Nordström, "Wood nymphs and patriots; depictions of Samoans in the National geographic", *Visual Sociology*, 7, 2, 1992, 49-59; Virginia-Lee Webb, "Manipulated images; European photographs of Pacific peoples", in Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush, eds, *Prehistories of the future; the Primitivist project and the culture of modernism*, (Stanford 1995), 175-201; Ken Buckley and Ken Klugman, *South Pacific focus; Burn's Philp's trading viewed through photographs early this century*, (Sydney, 1983); Lamont Lindstrom and Geoffrey White, *Island encounters; black and white memories of the Pacific war* (Washington 1990); Judy Annear, ed, *Portraits of Oceania*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, (Sydney 1997); Serge Kakou, *Découverte photographique de la Nouvelle-Calédonie* (Paris 1998); Ron Adams, *Framing the native; Rev James Hay Lawrie's Vanuatu photographs 1891-1894* (Port Vila 1998). The many books and articles by Father Patrick O'Reilly on photography in French possessions are an exceptional and unique contribution.

4 For a pioneering essay on links through the Coral Sea see, Clive Moore, "Queensland and its Coral Sea; implications of historical links between Australia and Melanesia" in Malcolm Gillies, ed, *Northern Exposures* (Canberra 1997), 79-102.

5 Roger Thompson, *Australian imperialism in the Pacific; the expansionist era 1820-1920*, Melbourne, 1980, 216 and Chapters 11 and 12; Ken Buckley and Ken Klugman, *The Australian presence in the Pacific; Burns Philp 1914-16*, (Sydney, 1983) Chps 1-6; William R Louis, *Great Britain and Germany's lost colonies 1914-19*, (Oxford, 1967). For documents on Australian links to the Pacific see; Ray Evans, Clive Moore, Kay Saunders and Brian Jamison, eds,

1901; *Our future's past; documenting Australia's federation*, (Sydney 1997), Chp 3; and Gordon Greenwood and Charles Grimshaw, eds, *Documents on Australia's international affairs 1901-1918*, (Sydney, 1977).

6 William McGregor, "The Pacific Islands and their political settlement", *United Empire*, March 1918, 107-10; William McGregor, "The settlement of the Pacific", *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, May 1918, 161-77; Edward ImThurn, "The present state of the Pacific Islands", *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, November 1918, 38-45; Gordon H Scholefield, "Problems of reconstruction in the Pacific", *United Empire*, July 1919, 326-29; AD McLaren, "A Monroe doctrine for Australasia", *Contemporary Review*, August 1918, 158-63; William Hughes, "Australia and the Pacific", *United Empire*, September 1918, 293-5; Frederic W Eggleston, "Australia's view of Pacific problems", *Pacific Affairs*, 3, 1930; Frederic W Eggleston, ed, *The Australian mandate in New Guinea* (Melbourne, 1928); Frederic W Eggleston, "The British Empire, Australia and the Pacific", *Australian Quarterly*, 4, 1936.

7 LF Fitzhardinge, "Australia, Japan and Great Britain 1914-18", *Historical Studies*, 14, 54, 1970, 250-59; William R Louis, "Australia and the German colonies in the Pacific 1914-19", *Journal of Modern History*, 38, 1966, 407-21; RC Snelling, "Peacemaking 1919; Australia, New Zealand and the British empire delegation at Versailles", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 4, 1, 1975, 15-28; Roger Thompson, "The Labour Party and Australian imperialism in the Pacific 1901-1919", *Labour History*, 23, 1972, 27-37.

8 As well as Brisbane's *The Queenslander*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Week*, *Daily Mail* and *The Queensland News Budget*, McMahon's material appeared in Sydney in *The Bulletin* (31 Jan 1918), *Sydney Mail* (27 Feb 1918 and 15 Jan 1919) and in Melbourne in *The Age* (27 Apr 1918). In 1920, McMahon wrote on the Solomon Islands again for *The Queenslander* (28 Aug 1920) and for the *Melbourne Leader* (21 Aug 1920) and in 1921 for Brisbane's *Daily Mail* (30 Jan 1921).

9 McMahon's publications on the Solomon Islands in 1918-1921 included, "Coconut growing as a career", *Worlds Work*, 31, 1918, 338-47; "The octopus; Germany in the Pacific", *Evening News* (London), 6 Dec 1918; "The islands of the South Pacific", *Dun's Review*, March 1918, 48-9 and 51; "The Gordon of the Pacific; my visit to Germany's South Sea possessions", *Wide World Magazine*, 42, 1918, 349-57; "Coconut cultivation" *The World's Markets*, August 1920, 27-31; "British Solomon Islands and their administration" *Bulletin* (Sydney), 31 Jan 1918, 6-7 and 31; "Among the natives", *Sydney Mail* (Sydney), 15 Jan 1919; "German Solomon Islands; an asset of the Commonwealth", *The Leader* (Melbourne), 21 Aug 1920, 51; "A Commonwealth dominion; the German Solomon Islands" *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 28 Aug 1920, 15; "The jewels of the Pacific", *Wide World Magazine*, 46, 1921, 350-56; "The jewels of the Pacific", *Daily Mail* (Brisbane), 30 Jan 1921, 15; "The Solomon Islands" *The Blue Peter*, (London) 1921, 163-7.

10 For McMahon see, Max Quanchi, "A trip through the islands in 1918; the photography of TJ McMahon", *Meanjin*, 53, 4, 1994, 714-22; Max Quanchi, "TJ McMahon; photographer, essayist and patriot in colonial Australia, the Pacific and empire", in Alaima Talu and Max Quanchi, eds, *Messy entanglements*, (Brisbane 1995), 49-62; Max Quanchi, "Thomas McMahon; photography as propaganda in the Pacific Islands", *History of Photography*, 21, 1, 1997, 42-53. McMahon had been a tutor in the Burnett district of Queensland prior to taking up

photography and writing. At the time of his early death in 1933 he was the Brisbane *Courier-Mail's* "Caravanning" and "Man on the land" photographer and reporter.

11 Judith Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons; a history of a Pacific archipelago 1800-1978*, (Honolulu 1987), 138. In Papua the exported value of copra increased threefold over the same period, see David Lewis, *The plantation dream; developing British New Guinea and Papua 1884-1942*, (Canberra 1996), Table 4, 311; Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian presence*, 49-52

12 *The Queenslander* claimed this could be re-worded "Consol of the Islands", *The Queenslander*, (Brisbane) 2 Mar 1918, 19; Thomas McMahon, 1918, "Coconut growing as a career", *World's Work*, 31, 1918, 339; Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*, 139.

13 Although women appeared in several group portraits, presumably as manager's wives, the imaging was masculine following the gendered perspective that the colonial frontier, tropical adventures and plantation life was man's work. McMahon referred to the role of a manager's wife in developing European enclaves but in 1917, there were few European women, perhaps forty, in the small expatriate population.

14 Thomas McMahon, "The Pacific Islands. What of their future. Australia's relationship", *The Queenslander*, 29 Dec 1917, 14.

15 A copy is held by the Royal Geographical Society, London, PR/056713. The image on the cover was a Nauruan male. On McMahon's "New Guinea" booklet a Fijian man appeared on the cover. In thousands of McMahon's published images there are relatively few miss captioned or misplaced images, usually the fault of sub-editors. There were seven booklets in the series and all used McMahon's photographs.

16 Marked copies of *The Queenslander* articles show new by-lines, deletions and reordering as they were prepared for other publications; *McMahon Papers*, 9038, 9053, Box 4, Royal Geographical Society, Brisbane.

17 *The Queenslander*, 11 May 1918, 29; Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian presence*, 28-31.

18 *The Queenslander*, 19 Jan 1918, 19.

19 *The Queenslander*, 9 Feb 1918, 15.

20 Workman to Bell 28 May 1918, 14/46 and Bell to Workman 10 Jun 1918, 14/12 in BSIP, 33/1918, National Archives, Honiara. I am grateful to Clive Moore for alerting me to this correspondence.

21 This exchange occurred as the Minister and Acting Minister returned from separate tours of Papua and New Guinea; *The Argus* (Melbourne), 13 May, 14 May, 21 Jul and 22 Jul 1921.

22 *The Queenslander*, 8 Sep 1917, p.38

23 *The Age*, (Melbourne), 12 Aug 1914, cited in Thompson, *Australian imperialism*, 203; Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian presence*, 4-7.

24 Cited in Stuart McIntyre, *The Oxford history of Australia; the succeeding age 1901-1942*, (Melbourne 1986), 178.

25 Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian presence*, 7

26 *Ibid.*, 19-20 and 26-28

27 *McMahon Papers*, Royal Geographical Society (Queensland), Brisbane. The Western Pacific High Commission had been criticised in London in 1902 by Alfred Deakin. He claimed the Commissioner "had never yet justified his title".

(*Morning Post*, London, 11 Mar 1902, cited in Evans, et.al., eds, *1901 Our future's past*, 216-17.

28 An Australian "Monroe doctrine" in the Pacific Islands was noted in 1898 (*Adelaide Advertiser*, 7 Jun 1898, cited in Ray Evans, *Ibid.*, 215-16). In 1902, the visiting British colonial official, journalist and author, Archibald Colquhoun claimed "the Australian Munroe Doctrine has not yet been officially promulgated or incorporated in the national policy, but its spirit is breathed by all Australians", AR Colquhoun, *The mastery of the Pacific*, (New York 1902); 204. See also, AD McLaren, "A Monroe doctrine", 158-63; M Tate, "The Australasian Munroe doctrine", *Political Science Quarterly*, 1961, 76.

29 Extract from the *London Evening News*, 14 Jun 1918, *The Week* (Brisbane), 21 Jun 1918; see also editorials in *The Week*, 28 Jun 1918 and 19 Jul 1918.

30 Anon., "The return of Mr Hughes", *Round Table*, 10 Dec 1919, 179-85; and *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives*, 10 Sep 1919, 12166-79 and 14 Sep 1920, 4454-7; WJ Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris*, (Melbourne 1978).

31 Hughes initial request was for control over the South Pacific (excluding New Zealand's link with Samoa). Sole control of Nauru's valuable phosphate resources was adjusted to a lesser demand for a joint administration; Maslyn Williams and Barrie Macdonald, *The phosphateers; a history of the British Phosphate Commission and the Christmas Island Phosphate Commission*, (Melbourne, 1985), 126-31.

32 Cited in Thompson, *Australian imperialism*, 213 and 218. *Round Table* claimed, "The average citizen of the Commonwealth (of Australia) troubles himself very little about imperial affairs at all". (Anon., "Australia and the empire", *Round Table*, 1, August 1911, 500) The outbreak of the Great War in 1914 and the rise of Japan in the north Pacific challenged public indifference, but sub-imperialism in the Pacific was not a regular subject of debate in federal and state parliaments.

33 McMahon's photographs appeared in *Lone Hand*, 1 Nov 1918, 508; in serial encyclopaedia such as ARH Moncrieff, ed, *The New World of Today*, (London 1922); JA Hammerton, ed, *Peoples of all nations*, (London 1923); and JA Hammerton, ed, *Countries of the world*, (London 1925) with fifteen of McMahon's photographs and a colour cover (a canoe prow) on Volume 37, June 1925.

34 Extracts from McMahon's writing on mandates were reprinted in *Lone Hand*, on German New Guinea in the *Bulletin* (Sydney) and the *Sydney Sun* and his descriptions of the New Hebrides, Torres Strait Islands and Norfolk Island were reprinted in *Stewarts Handbook of the Pacific Islands* in 1921 and on Fiji in the 1923 edition.

35 Thompson, *Australian imperialism*, 221.

36 Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*, 138 and 142; Lewis, *The plantation dream*, 89 and 104-5.

37 Lewis, *The plantation dream*, Chp 7 ("The country of chances"). Bennett notes an Australian newspaper article in 1910 was titled, "The wealth of the Solomons"; Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*, 138.

38 Deryck Scarr, *Kingdoms of the reefs; the history of the Pacific Islands*, (Sydney, 1990), 256; Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*, 148.

39 Lewis, *The plantation dream*, 72-4.

- 40 Although world prices were high, the war limited shipping available for commercial freight. Copra was the major export, but was smoke-dried rather than hot air or sun dried and produced only 0.7 to 0.8% of the world supply; Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*, 199 and 219.
- 41 Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian presence*, 33 and 28-31.
- 42 Thomas McMahon, "The South Pacific Islands; their resources and prospects", *Empire Review*, 33, 1919, 250
- 43 Anon., "Australian administration in Papua", *Round Table*, June 1925, 15, 573-82.
- 44 Merl La Voy, "With a camera in the Solomon Islands", *Sydney Mail*, 7 Dec and 28 Dec 1921, 4 Jan and 1 Feb 1922.
- 45 Anon., "The mysterious Solomons", *The Queenslander*, 13 Aug, 27 Aug, 3 Sep and 17 Sep 1910; Anon., "Development in the Solomon Islands", *ibid.*, 15 Oct and 29 Oct 1910.
- 46 Anon., "Future of the Solomons", *Ibid.*, 16 Jan 1915 and Anon, "In the Solomon Islands", *Ibid.*, 1 Jan 1916.

Abstract

A ten-week series with sixty photographs on the Solomon Islands was not unusual in illustrated newspapers and magazines in the early 20th century. *The Queenslander* was maintaining a pattern of photographic imaging of sub-empire going back to the 1890s, concentrating on possible post-war colonial realignments, appropriateness of British policy and the economic and political roles Australians would adopt if a formal relationship existed with the Solomon Islands. In calling for a greater presence, *The Queenslander* was supported by expansionists, missions, and traders, shipping companies and readers with personal links through work, investment, friends or missions. This essay acknowledges the role of photography in Australian relations with the Pacific, its role in shaping public opinion and for the access historically it offers on Australia's diverse regional links and particularly Australia's thwarted claims for a closer relationship with the Solomons, depicted optimistically as a planter's paradise and a potential addition to an Australian sub-empire.

Author details

Max Quanchi, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Human Services,
Queensland University of Technology,

Address

Dr Max Quanchi
QUT Carseldine
Beams Road, Carseldine, Australia 4034

Telephone 61-7-38644519,
FAX 61-7-38644719
Email; m.quanchi@qut.edu.au

